

THREE DECADES OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRESS

1970

- Twenty million people celebrate the first Earth Day.
- President Richard Nixon creates EPA with a mission to protect the environment and human health. The Agency is formed from parts of the Department of the Interior; the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; the Department of Agriculture; the Atomic Energy Commission; the Federal Radiation Council; and the Council on Environmental Quality.
- Congress amends the **Clean Air Act** to set national air quality, auto emission, and anti-pollution standards.

1971

- Congress restricts use of lead-based paint in residences and on cribs and toys. (**Lead-Based Paint Poisoning Prevention Act**)

1972

- EPA bans dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), a cancer-causing pesticide.
- The United States and Canada agree to clean up the Great Lakes, which contain 95 percent of America's fresh water and as of 2000 supply drinking water for 25 million people.
- EPA embarks on a major national commitment to build an advanced network of sewage treatment facilities to limit raw sewage flowing into rivers, lakes, and streams. (**Federal Water Pollution Control Act**)
- Congress requires more robust health and safety reviews of pesticides based on scientific evaluations. (Under amendments to the **Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act**)

1973

- EPA begins phasing out lead in gasoline.
- EPA issues the first permit limiting a factory's polluted discharges into waterways. EPA now regulates water pollution from 45,000 industrial facilities, preventing one billion pounds of toxics from entering waterways each year. (**Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972** regulating point source dischargers)

1974

- EPA is authorized to regulate the quality and safety of the public drinking water supply, including requirements for physical and chemical treatment of drinking water. (**Safe Drinking Water Act**)

1975

- Congress establishes fuel economy standards and EPA sets tailpipe emission standards for cars.

1976

- President Gerald Ford signs the **Toxic Substances Control Act** which authorizes EPA to track industrial chemicals produced or imported into the United States.
- EPA begins phaseout of cancer-causing polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) production and use.
- Congress passes the **Resource Conservation and Recovery Act**, regulating hazardous waste from its production to its disposal and providing incentives for recovery of valuable resources from solid waste.

1977

- President Jimmy Carter signs the **Clean Air Act Amendments**.
- Congress passes the **Clean Water Act**, the result of amendments to the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1972 with a focus on toxic pollutants.

1978

- Residents discover that Love Canal, New York, is contaminated by buried leaking chemical containers. The cleanup is completed through the Superfund Program in 1989, and the area is proclaimed habitable.
- EPA demonstrates scrubber technology for removing air pollution from coal-fired power plants.

1979

- EPA bans two herbicides containing dioxins, chemical compounds that are by-products of certain industrial activities that cause cancer and other adverse health effects.

1980

- Congress creates **Superfund** (through the **Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act**) to clean up abandoned hazardous waste sites.

1981

- EPA issues its first hazardous waste storage permit under the **Resource Conservation and Recovery Act**.

1982

- Dioxin contamination forces the government to purchase homes in Times Beach, Missouri. The federal government and the responsible polluters share the costs of cleanups. By 1997 dioxin-contaminated soil and debris at Times Beach and 27 related sites in Eastern Missouri had been safely excavated and incinerated.
- A PCB landfill protest in North Carolina begins the environmental justice movement.

1983

- Cleanup actions begin to rid the Chesapeake Bay of pollution stemming from sewage treatment plants, urban runoff, and farm waste.
- EPA encourages homeowners to test for radon gas, which is a leading cause of lung cancer.
- EPA issues the first Superfund National Priorities List, containing 406 sites nationwide.

1984

- Amendments to the **Resource Conservation and Recovery Act** require EPA to issue regulations for and to establish a program to control underground tanks containing petroleum, hazardous wastes, and other designated substances. (**The Federal Hazardous and Solid Waste Amendments**)
- EPA adopts the Indian Policy to explicitly address the role of tribes in environmental management. As of 2000, five of EPA's statutes specifically allow for EPA authorization of tribal programs or a substantial role for tribes.

1985

- Scientists report that a giant hole in the earth's ozone layer opens each spring over Antarctica.
- EPA joins an international convention in Vienna calling for worldwide cooperative efforts to eliminate use of substances that deplete the ozone layer.

1986

- Congress declares the public has a right to know when toxic chemicals are released into air, land, and water with the **Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act**.
- President Ronald Reagan signs the **Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act**, thereby increasing the size of the trust fund to \$8.5 billion, stressing permanent remedies, and increasing state involvement.
- Congress passes the Asbestos **Hazard Emergency Response Act**, and the Asbestos in Schools Program, protecting workers, the public, and children from exposure to asbestos.
- President Reagan signs **Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments**.

1987

- The United States and 28 other nations sign the Montreal Protocol, pledging to phase out production of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), a primary cause of stratospheric ozone depletion.
- EPA implements the National Estuary Program, bringing together federal, state, and local agencies to restore and protect estuaries serving as habitats and nursery grounds for two-thirds of the nation's commercial fish and shellfish.

1988

- Congress bans ocean dumping of sewage sludge and industrial waste. (**Ocean Dumping Ban Act**)
- The Gulf of Mexico Program is established as a community-based, citizen-led program for the Gulf region.
- Congress accelerates the reregistration process for previously registered pesticides and authorizes the collection of fees to support reregistration activities. (Under amendments to the **Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act**)

1989

- The *Exxon Valdez* spills 11 million gallons of crude oil in Alaska's Prince William Sound. Exxon is fined \$1 billion, the largest criminal environmental damage settlement in history.
- EPA makes publicly available the first annual community right-to-know information on the location and nature of toxic chemical releases in communities around the country, through the new Toxics Release Inventory Program.

1990

- President George Bush signs the **Clean Air Act Amendments**, which contain innovative approaches to pollution control and the promise of a renewed national commitment to environmental protection.
- *Reducing Risk*, a landmark report from EPA's Science Advisory Board, calls for the setting of national environmental priorities and greater use of science in decision-making on environmental regulation.
- President George Bush signs the **Pollution Prevention Act**, emphasizing the importance of preventing—not just correcting—environmental damage.

1991

- Under EPA's coordination, all federal agencies begin using recyclable and recycled content products whenever possible.
- EPA launches Green Lights®, a voluntary program to encourage corporations, government agencies, and other institutions to install energy-efficient lighting.

1992

- EPA signs partnership agreements with eight leading computer manufacturers to promote energy-efficient personal computers and prevent air pollution associated with power generation through the Energy Star Program.
- Congress passes the **Indian Environmental General Assistance Program Act**. This legislation allows EPA to assist tribes in planning, developing, or establishing environmental protection programs through the administration of grants.
- EPA establishes a network of Environmental Finance Centers through cooperative agreements with universities. The Environmental Finance Center Network now consists of nine centers that assist customers in 40 states on such issues as rate setting, capacity development, brownfields redevelopment, affordability strategies, asset management, and capital budgeting.

1993

- EPA reports secondhand smoke contaminates indoor air, posing serious health risks to nonsmokers.
- EPA announces the Common Sense Initiative, an effort to shift environmental regulation to a sector-based approach.

1994

- EPA launches its Brownfields Program to facilitate the cleanup of abandoned, contaminated sites for productive use.
- The Tribal Caucus of the Tribal Operations Committee is established to improve communication and build stronger partnerships with the Agency.

1995

- EPA launches an incentive-based acid rain program to reduce sulfur dioxide emissions. Within 2 years, researchers report unprecedented reductions in acid rain.
- The National Environmental Performance Partnership System (NEPPS) gives states, and EPA a more flexible process for setting priorities, clarifying responsibilities, and making the most effective use of taxpayer dollars.
- Project XL (eXcellence and Leadership) is introduced. Under this initiative, companies, facilities, states, and localities develop innovative ways to achieve results that go beyond those required by environmental regulations.

1996

- Congress enacts the amendments to the **Safe Drinking Water Act**. The amendments emphasize sound science and risk-based standard setting, small water supply system flexibility and technical assistance, community-empowered source water assessment and protection, public right-to-know, and water system infrastructure assistance through a multibillion-dollar state revolving loan fund.
- The Grand Canyon Transport Visibility Commission—consisting of states, tribes, and federal agencies (e.g., EPA and the Department of the Interior)—agree to improve visibility at the canyon, working with public interest and business groups.
- Congress establishes a health-based standard for pesticides used on food crops, with added protections for infants and children. (**Food Quality Protection Act**)



1997

- An Executive Order is issued to protect children from environmental health risks, including childhood asthma and lead poisoning. EPA provides tips to help parents protect their children from environmental factors that can trigger asthma attacks.
- The United States and Canada sign an unprecedented agreement (the Binational Toxics Strategy) to essentially eliminate toxic substances from the Great Lakes.

1998

- EPA requires states to reduce nitrogen oxide (NO_x) emissions to reduce smog in the eastern United States. EPA encourages states to use an emission trading program called “cap and trade,” which allows industries greater flexibility in choosing pollution controls because they can buy and sell market-based “credits” to reduce their NO_x emissions.

1999

- EPA issues new emissions standards for cars, sport utility vehicles (SUVs), minivans, and trucks, requiring them to be 77 percent to 95 percent cleaner starting with model year 2004.

2000

- Marking the 30th anniversary of Earth Day, the Agency launches its new Internet home page at <http://www.epa.gov>, making environmental information more accessible to the tens of millions of visitors who visit the site each month. As part of the Earth Day-related launch, EPA regional offices around the country release reports detailing environmental progress and public health protection achieved over the past 30 years.